
Allen Ginsberg letters to Gregory Corso
1982-1985

Abstract: Allen Ginsberg wrote these postcards and letters to Gregory Corso between 1982 and 1985.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 099, F907
Title: Allen Ginsberg letters to Gregory Corso
Inclusive Dates: 1982-1985
Extent: 10 items (10 p.)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 099, F907, Allen Ginsberg letters to Gregory Corso, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.
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Biographical Notes

Allen Ginsberg

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) was born in Newark, New Jersey, and educated at Columbia University.

Before achieving success as a writer, Ginsberg worked as a dishwasher, a welder and served in the U.S. Merchant Marine. Literary notice followed publication of Ginsberg's Howl and Other Poems (1956) in the Pocket Poet Series of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books. This collection, which includes "Supermarket in California," "Sunflower Sutra," and "America," distinguished Ginsberg as a leading poet of the Beat movement.

After 1956, Ginsberg traveled extensively, became involved with civil rights campaigns and war resistance movements, and continued to write poetry. One of Ginsberg's most celebrated later poems is "Kaddish," a poem on the death of his mother collected in Kaddish and Other Poems, 1958-1960. Ginsberg died on April 5, 1997.

Gregory Corso

Born in New York City, American poet Gregory Corso (1930-2001) was a young associate of the Beat poets.

Corso spent his early years in and out of prison. During a sentence for robbery at Dannemora prison in upstate New York, he read and developed a passion for Percy Bysshe Shelley and Homer. When he was released from prison in 1950, he moved to Greenwich Village and eventually developed friendships with Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac.

In 1954, Corso moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and became a fixture of the literary underground. A group of Harvard students and intellectuals were so impressed with his poetry that they paid for the publication of his first collection, The Vestal Lady on Brattle.

Corso's first major book, Gasoline, contained poems written during his travels with Allen Ginsberg in Mexico and while he lived in Paris from 1957 to 1958. The volume, with its introduction by Allen Ginsberg, was published by City Lights in 1958. Corso's literary reputation was established in 1960 when he was included in the Grove Press Anthology, The New American Poetry 1945-1960.

Corso died in 2001 and his ashes were buried next to the grave of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Rome.

Sources:


Scope and Content Note

Allen Ginsberg wrote these postcards and letters to Gregory Corso between 1982 and 1985.

This correspondence offer glimpses of Ginsberg's life, travels, and work during these years; as well as reveal his continued connections to other individuals related to the Beat movement, including John Wieners, William Burroughs, and Gary Snyder. Additionally the letters mention Ginsberg's longtime partner Peter Orlovsky, poets Michael McClure and Kaye McDonough, as well as bohemian artist and ethnomusicologist Harry Everett Smith.

In the first letter of this collection, dated June 5, 1982, Ginsberg wrote of his recent 56th birthday and preparations to travel to New York. He also explained that on his way to New York he planned a "stopover weekend" in Lawrence, Kansas to visit William Burroughs.

Ginsberg also reported on trips to the Netherlands, China, England, and Charleville, France. In Charleville, France, Ginsberg stayed in Rimbaud's old apartment, which he reported as unchanged, and felt like he was "sleeping with the ghost of Rimbaud."

During Ginsberg's visit to the Netherlands in January of 1983, he recorded his poem, "September on Jessore Road," with the Mondrian String Quartet, using a score written by Steven Taylor. Of this "perfect" recording at the Milky Way (De Melkweg), Ginsberg wrote: "11 minutes poesy music, I waited 11 years to finish this ideal setting! Done!"

After Ginsberg and Corso had met in England for a visit in April of 1984, Ginsberg wrote to Corso: "Thanks for sublime evening poesy--Shelly'd a been proud." By November of 1984 Ginsberg was in China. On a postcard depicting the "No Politics" Garden in Suchow, China, Ginsberg wrote of writing poems at Han-Shan's temple in China, of spending a week in Beijing, and of viewing the 200 B.C. clay army of the first Han emperor in Xian, China.

In addition to reports from his travels, Ginsberg mentioned setting up his house in New York City and related domestic chores. He also wrote that Harper's would finally publish his collected works and he had begun work on the acknowledgments and related material.

Ginsberg wrote to arrange for Gregory Corso to teach at Naropa. He encouraged Corso to schedule an additional reading to make the visit financially beneficial. Ginsberg reported that the Naropa Institute was broke, but that the Institute would charge for Corso's workshop to raise money and that he would pay Corso whatever he could out of his own pocket.

These letters confirm Ginsberg's friendship with Gregory Corso and his respect for his fellow Beat poet's work.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Ginsberg, Allen, 1926-1997--Correspondence.

Corso, Gregory--Correspondence.

Topical Terms

American poetry--History--20th century--Correspondence.

Beat Generation (Group of writers)--History--20th century--Correspondence.

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.

Postcards.

Personal Contributors

Corso, Gregory, correspondent.

Related Materials in this Repository

This item forms part of MSS 099 Miscellaneous Literary and Historical Manuscripts.

MSS 099 F759, Allen Ginsberg poems and letters

MSS 481, Robert A. Wilson collection
Arrangement

Arranged in chronological order.
Detailed Description of the Collection

Autograph letter signed with envelope, 1982 June 5 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph postcard signed, 1982 December 21 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph postcard signed, 1983 January 3 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph letter signed with envelope, 1984 February 18 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph letter signed with envelope, 1984 March 1 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Typed letter signed with return-addressed envelope, 1984 March 25 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph note signed, 1984 April 22 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph postcard signed, 1984 November 16 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)
A transcription of the text of the postcard is included.

Autograph letter signed, 1985 October 19 [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)

Autograph letter signed, [1985] [Box 62 F907]
1 item (1 p.)